

SPEARS WITH INCISED ORNAMENT.

By R. ETHERIDGE, Junr., Curator.

IN 1897, I fully described* an Australian Spear with incised ornament, extending nearly the whole length of the weapon. I further commented on the rarity of this form of sculpture amongst Aboriginal spears, and the general absence of illustrations in works of reference. In working through the store collection of Ethnology, I met with four additional examples, so far similar, that nearly the entire surfaces are covered with ornamental incisions, but all differing in the motive, and three of them greatly so, from the spear referred to.

The first is of the same length as the already described specimen, viz., eleven feet nine inches, but lacks the colour bands near the point or apex. The serpentine longitudinal grooves are five instead of six in number, and extend from within two feet three inches of the point, and nine inches of the butt. The grooves are toothed in a similar manner, but instead of the serrations looking backwards, *i.e.*, towards the butt, they are presented forwards towards the point of the weapon; furthermore, the interstices between the serpentine grooves are occupied by V-shaped and bird's feet ("broad arrow") incisions, or simple oblique nicks, arranged with a certain degree of order, like with like. The ornament at the butt is finished off by four feather-like incised tags, consisting of a central groove margined by oblique nicks, reminding one of the feathered shaft of an arrow. This spear is said to have come from the Paroo River District, but from which side of the border I am unable to say.

The three remaining spears are much shorter weapons, being each a trifle over seven feet in length. On the first the sculpture is spiral, consisting of two bands, extending from the butt to within two feet of the point. The bands are each defined by two grooves, the interspaces being cross incised, thus giving them greater prominence and effect, but the apical two feet is variously occupied. First, proceeding upwards from the termination of the spiral bands, a rude representation of the human form is seen, with one arm only, and above this an oval body, both infilled with cross incisions. These are succeeded by sundry serpentine and meandering bands similar to the spiral already described. The interspaces are occupied by V-shaped incisions, oblique nicks, and what not.

* Rec. Aust. Mus., iii., 1, 1897, p. 6.

The second shorter spear is carved to a certain extent like the first. From the butt to within two feet seven inches of the point, two encircling or spiral bands traverse the surface exactly as in the first spear, but they are connected by two other bands running somewhat obliquely to the weapon's length, and at the same time are discontinuous, leaving free or unoccupied gaps. The result is that even these disconnected bands become in the long run elongately spiral in a contrary direction to the main bands, and, where present, divide the spear surface into long ovals. Some of the latter are occupied by zig-zag lines of nicks, either transverse to the length of the weapon, or oblique to it. The apical space of two feet seven inches contains an undoubted human figure, with both arms raised straight above the head, a boomerang-like object, and a third outline that may be intended to represent a fish; the first and last figures are obliquely cross-incised. It is to be noted that the position of the arms in the human figure is one frequently seen in similar representations amongst the rock-carvings of the Sydney District, and on the dilly-baskets of North-Central Australia. Above the figures, and to the apex, the surface is occupied by a single broad spiral band cross-barred, the interstitial surfaces being ornamented in a similar manner to those of the lower portion of the weapon.

The third spear presents a complex style of incised sculpture, extending from within eight inches of the base to four inches of the point. It consists of short spiral bands terminating simply; others meander and return on themselves, either at one or both ends; some again cross others forming oval loops by their intersection, ultimately becoming so complex that it is difficult to follow the pattern. Near the centre of the spear, on two of the interspaces are two objects that may be intended for shields, whilst on a third is another that has some general resemblance to a conventionalised bird. The human form is absent. The carving on this weapon is much rougher, and less well executed than on the others. In all, the section is circular, the ends pointed, acutely at the apex, obtusely at the butt.

I am unable to state, either the immediate locality of these spears, or the site of their manufacture. The first described by me was derived from Angledool, on the Narran River, close to the Queensland Border, in Central North New South Wales. The equally long weapon, now described, is believed to be from the Paroo River, rather more to the west, but from which side of the border is not known. It seems possible that whether manufactured or merely localised, this type of spear may be regarded as characteristic of the district in question. It is, however, very difficult and even hazardous, in the absence of definite information, added to the practice of barter, so common amongst the Australian Aborigines, to fix the locality of any weapon or implement.